



## **A Client's Guide to Doula Care**

# What is a Death & Resurrection Doula?

## *Professionalism & Ethics*

*The role of a death doula is specifically designed to assist the patient and the family with understanding the natural process of death (before, during, and after) while providing suggestions for comfort and support as well as advocating for autonomy in the choices of the patient and encouraging the best communication possible between family, caregivers, and professionals working in the direct care of the patient.*

What is a doula? Doula is an ancient Greek word meaning “a woman who serves.” While of course not all doulas are women, service is at the heart of doula work. If you have ever heard of a doula, it is likely it is around childbirth. A death (or end-of-life doula) is a non-medical practitioner trained to assist in the dying process. Through holistic practice, a doula helps families and communities care for someone who is dying. Doulas support patients, caregivers, families, and communities. The concept of a doula is becoming a vital role in the end-of-life process. Death Doulas can add quality of life to the end of life. Hiring a doula can transform the death experience for everyone involved. With the assistance of a trained doula, the end-of-life process can be proficiently less muddled, after-death planning can be made lighter, and the family can focus on being a family.

Doulas are quickly becoming end-of-life ambassadors and are a cutting-edge way to deal with death. A Death Positive movement aims at taking death back — bringing it home — so to speak. After a century of outsourcing death care to hospitals and funeral homes, individuals are revisiting the idea of dying at home, and families are finding themselves in a new role of becoming caregivers to the dying.

It may be difficult for prospective clients to see the value of an end-of-life or death doula. There are a couple of reasons for this. One reason is that the role is relatively new. Many people are not aware of doulas serving in end-of-life care. This leads to the likely connection to the fact that many people are not *aware* of the needs that will arise when someone they love is facing death.

One of these needs is hospice care. But, hospice care alone cannot fulfill the dying person and his or her family's needs. Generally, the hospice team is well equipped to help patients and families work through fear and sadness, and a hospice social worker will assist individuals and families in locating additional resources, but even if a personal care aide is hired to be present in assisting with the activities of daily living, a family will likely still be overwhelmed with all of the needs that occur when someone is dying.

A doula is not a personal care aide and cannot administer medical services. If a certified doula also has a personal care aide certificate or nursing license, he or she may serve in multiple capacities if the services are agreed upon by both the doula and the person(s) receiving care.

The **value** of a Death and Resurrection Doula lies outside of both the necessary personal care and medical care. A doula may overlap with the provisions of hospice care in a few different ways, but this does not reduce the necessity of a certified doula.

*How does a doula participate with families when a dying person is referred to hospice?*

1. **No regulations on time and visits:** a doula is not regulated by an insurance reimbursement structure. (This also includes the time before and after hospice care) A doula can stay with a family throughout the entire end-of-life process, which lasts much longer than the point where the hospice team must exit the scene.
2. **Professional commitment:** some of the greatest services are done through volunteer work, but this should not underestimate the value of professional services. The unregulated time of a professional doula is a game-changer for families and dying people. A certified doula will guide a family every step of the way keeping everything organized and on time while offering a family the time to be with their dying loved one. A doula also incorporates faith-based grief care and engaged support from the faith community.
3. **Community engagement:** doulas serve as a link between church communities and the patient and family. What other needs need to be met? Housekeeping, food service, visitation, respite care, prayer chains, and more.
4. **Doula care services:** helping with memory projects and completing a life review have become popular doula services. A hospice volunteer could also help in some capacity with these important facets of death care, but hiring a Christian doula gives these tasks fresh importance. Regret and the need to clear up estranged relationships may haunt dying people and people they love. God's unlimited grace and forgiveness provide the way forward. Joy and sadness should also be embraced at the end-of-life.
5. **Comfort care plans:** this work includes helping the family care for the patient, and establishing visitation schedules for community visitors, friends, and family. Doulas support families in keeping with the care plan for the highest dignity of the patient and peace of mind for the family. Oftentimes, panic sets in as death arrives. Doulas help families and patients through this difficult transition.
6. **Vigil & funeral planning:** doulas help families prepare for the death vigil, a dynamic time of waiting and expectation for Believers. Once a death has occurred, the funeral displays the

family and community's faith in God and their commitment to the deceased human being. Doulas can assist in preparations for this event.

7. **Continued Support:** new needs will arise after a death has occurred and a family settles into a new way of life. A doula who has journeyed with a family will be a supportive presence in the days to come.

### *Ethics, Code of Conduct, Patient & Employer Rights*

Professionalism, confidentiality, and the highest ethical standards are of utmost importance for a Death and Resurrection Doula practitioner. Every patient and family served is unique, and services will be tailored to their individual needs providing physical, emotional, and spiritual support to the patient, family, loved ones, friends, and their support communities. There are **certain limits** to the scope of what a doula can offer in care. Death Doulas should carry insurance, but they do not perform any medical tasks such as administering medication, checking vital signs, wound care, or incontinence care (if a licensed medical professional acting as a doula wishes to use their skill in addition to doula work, they must rely on the parameters of and training of that field of work, and such expectations are spelled out in the contract). While a doula cannot carry out these specific tasks, he or she has been trained to provide education regarding the end-of-life process and the options available so that families can make informed decisions about their care. The goal of a doula is to collaborate with the hospice and any other healthcare professionals on your case to create a dynamic support system to ensure the highest level of care in the end-of-life process. During each visit, a doula will assess any outstanding acute and safety issues to be addressed and will be equipped with referral resources in order to maximize the necessary support that is outside of the trained doula's scope of practice.

Death and Resurrection Doulas may not engage in any form of **discrimination** based on race, creed, socioeconomic status, or gender. No form of **sexual relationship or harassment**, physical or verbal, is permitted between a doula and a patient, family, or community member. Any form of **dishonesty or fraudulent behavior** is unacceptable. A doula must uphold a patient and family's **confidentiality** to the highest degree. This means there is no sharing of financial, medical, or personal information unless there is permission. This includes **social media posting** of any sort, even if names and photos are omitted. If a doula has a concern, a doula can take these steps: ask for direction by making an anonymous post on the Certified Doula discussion board, seek help from the Church pastor, and/or inform the family of other professionals who may be able to help address a situation (including the hospice team). Always alert the family to the steps(s) you are taking.

**Autonomy** and **dignity** are essential for someone with a terminal illness. A doula will not usurp the choices available to someone, but with competence and service, a doula should use his or her knowledge to help a person understand how his or her choices might play out. A doula can best help maintain a dying person's dignity by ensuring his or her needs are being met.

A Death and Resurrection Doula must offer patients and families **reasonable availability of service** and a **reasonable pricing structure**. *If a doula does not feel he or she is the best fit for a job, it is best practice to refer an individual or family to another doula.*

Private end-of-life doula care falls under a **consumer-directed model** of service. There is no overarching agency involved in doula placement, rate negotiations, or employee benefits. The family or individual is considered the employer. The employer is responsible for hiring a doula and has every right to terminate the provided contract if the doula does not do his or her job adequately. Creating contracts for service is covered in the training program. Doulas may decline service requests that are not stated specifically in the contract. For instance, toileting and incontinence care are not doula services and an employer cannot require this help.

### *What Christians Believe about God and His Creation*

- God is the Creator of the Universe. He is a Trinitarian God who is Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.
- Human beings are created by God in His Image.
- Death entered the world through the sin of Adam, and this affects every single human being (Original Sin).
- In Jesus Christ, God has atoned for the sin of humanity on the cross.
- God justifies sinners because of Jesus; Good works provide no salvation.
- God requires fundamental dependence upon His free gift of salvation. *Justification by grace through faith alone* is the basis of human dignity before God.
- God commands all human beings to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*” and to “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Mark 12:30-31).
- **Jesus Christ will return again.** The dead will be raised and those who believe in Jesus will be with Jesus: “He will hand over the Kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power...The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

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The Death and Resurrection Doula Training Program is a complete certification program for Death Doulas. The first module, **Rediscovering The Cross: Theology in Practice**, focuses on the spiritual aspects of death from a Christian perspective. The second module, **Death Doula Practitioner Training**, incorporates the Christian understanding of Death into Death Doula practice.

Although the Death and Resurrection Doula training program is a faith-based program, it is not exclusive. This goes for doulas who are training and for the population served. A doula does not need to be a Christian to sign up for the training program. They only need to be aware the training is built upon the Christian faith and that many training doulas are Christians, who want to talk about their faith. Other doula training programs include some talk of spirituality.

Oftentimes it is new-age centered and that is why many Christians are looking for an alternative program.

Certified Death and Resurrection Doulas cannot require a family to adhere to the Christian faith. A Jew or non-Christian should be confident in hiring a Death and Resurrection certified death doula knowing that they will get the services they need with or without religious discussion. For the Christian doula, being grounded in his or her faith will be a foundation of their strength in service.

I believe it is very important that all faiths are respected and understood. Eventually, there may be more discussion about other faiths, but the underlying rule for this program is that no faith other than Christianity will be incorporated into the curriculum other than for purely educational purposes. This is my commitment to being the only Christian training program in the world.